

September 24, 2009

SUBJECT: Guidance for Establishing Performance Plans for the Fiscal Year 2010
Performance Cycle

TO: Administrator's Council
Deputy Area Directors
AFM Division Directors
Area Personnel Assistants

FROM: Theresa Bailey
Human Resources Specialist
Performance and Awards Staff, Human Resources Division (HRD)

This memorandum defines parameters for establishing employee Performance Plans for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 cycle, October 1, 2009 – September 30, 2010. This guidance applies to all non-SES ARS employees. Attached is a "Checklist for Preparing Performance Plans" that identifies requirements that we hope will aid supervisors and managers in the process.

The first step of any performance cycle is to establish expectations for employees in the form of a Performance Plan. Performance Plans should be established and provided to employees within thirty (30) days of the performance cycle. When plans are established early in the rating cycle it helps to ensure that employees are clear about expectations and provides ample time for the employees to work against the performance standards. Performance plans should be established using the official Performance Plan, Progress Review and Appraisal Worksheets (Forms AD-435A/B have been revised into an expandable version combining them into one document named AD-435A/B Revised). This form are available in 'e-Forms'.

Performance Plans are considered established when the Rating and Reviewing Officials have signed and dated the plan; the expectations have been communicated to the employee; the employee has signed and dated the plan, and a copy has been provided to the employee. The original plan should be retained by the supervisor.

As a reminder, the Rating and Reviewing Officials may not be the same person; the Reviewing Official should be at a higher organizational level, normally the Rating Official's supervisor. Additionally, obtaining the employee's signature on the plan does not mean the employee necessarily agrees with the expectations or goals in the plan, only that performance expectations have been communicated to him/her. If an employee chooses not to sign the plan, a note should be written in the employee signature box stating, "Discussion of the Performance Plan was held on (date) and the employee declined to sign the plan."

Employee Listings, which identify the employees of various supervisors and managers, will be provided to Area Personnel Assistants no later than one month from the date of this memorandum. The Listings should be forwarded to supervisors and managers to certify that Performance Plans were established for employees. The supervisor or manager will notate the Listing with the date the plan was established. Additionally, if no plan was established, the supervisor will document the reason on the Listing. Should an employee not be reflected on the Listing, please add his/her name and the date the plan was established. Completed Listings are due to HRD **no later than December 31, 2009**, and may be faxed or mailed to PAS/HRD. PAS's fax is (301) 504-4435 and the mailing address is: USDA/ARS/Human Resources

Division, Performance and Awards Staff, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1282D, Beltsville, MD 20705-5107.

Should you have any questions regarding the guidance in this memorandum, please contact Theresa Bailey at (301) 504-1452 or your servicing Human Resources Specialist.

Attachment

cc:

AC Secretaries

DAD Secretaries

AFM Division Director Secretaries

All HRD Employees

CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING PERFORMANCE PLANS

The following are some reminders for establishing a Performance Plan.

- ↑ 1. Check the employee's position description for accuracy; the major duties in the position description should be included in the Performance Plan as critical elements. Accomplishment of organizational objectives and goals can be included in Performance Plans.
- ↑ 2. Employee participation in developing the plan is desirable. However, the Rating and Reviewing Officials have the final authority for establishing the Performance Plan.
- ↑ 3. All plans must be documented, in writing, on Form AD435A/B Revised, Performance Plan, Progress Review and Appraisal Worksheet.
- ↑ 4. The plan must align with Agency and/or organizational goals. At least one performance element must link to the strategic goals and objectives of the organization.
- ↑ 5. Include results-focused performance measures for each performance element. Elements and standards should be accurate, objective, measurable, attainable, and understandable.
- ↑ 6. Performance Plans should contain a minimum of three but not more than seven critical performance elements. Each Performance Plan must contain at least one non-critical element.
- ↑ 7. Performance Plans for non-supervisory employees must include in at least one of the critical elements the responsibility for demonstrating a commitment to EEO/CR.
- ↑ 8. Performance Plans must contain a critical performance element for safety and health, when warranted by the employee's position.
- ↑ 9. Performance Plans may contain generic elements and standards for similar occupations.
- ↑ 10. An employee officially designated as a supervisor must have a separate critical performance element for Supervision and/or Leadership/Management, which includes a performance standard that addresses accountability for performance management of others including preparation of Performance Plans, progress reviews, annual appraisals, and other related duties.
- ↑ 11. An employee officially designated as a supervisor must contain employee and customer/stakeholder perspectives in their Performance Plans.
- ↑ 12. An employee officially designated as a supervisor must have a separate critical performance element that addresses Equal Employment Opportunity/Civil Rights.
- ↑ 13. The Performance Plan must be signed by the supervisor, reviewing official (normally the second-level supervisor) and employee. The employee should then receive a copy of the approved plan.